

An artist's impression of President William Henry Harrison's inauguration in 1841. Harrison refused to use a closed carriage and rode on horseback to and from the U.S. Capitol on a bitterly cold, wet day. He died of pneumonia a month later.

The Inauguration of the U.S. President

By RICH A VARMA

Inauguration Day represents the continuity of leadership for America. With its speeches and festivities, it also represents the country's renewal.



One hundred and forty-four years after African Americans first marched in President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural parade, the inauguration of Barack Obama, the first African American U.S. president, commemorated the 200th anniversary of

Lincoln's birth in 1809 with the theme "A New Birth of Freedom."

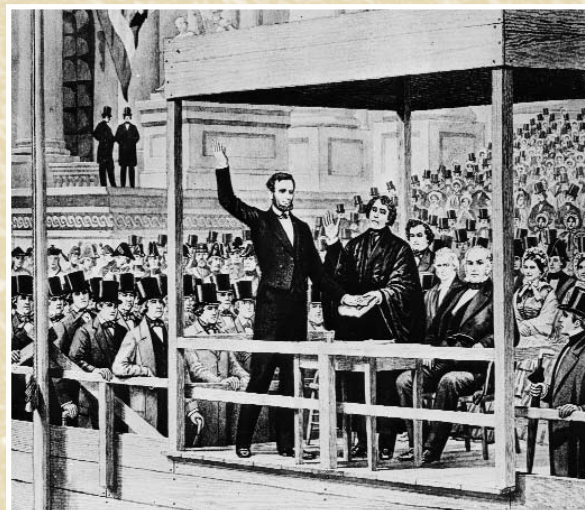
These words are from Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address of 1863. Although the phrase "...government of the people, by the people, and for the people..." is iconic, the lesser known "this nation shall have a new birth of freedom" was the cor-

nerstone for Obama's 2009 inaugural theme. The battle of Gettysburg was a turning point in the American Civil War and the 16th U.S. president hoped the sacrifice of those who died for the unity of the nation would lead to "a new birth of freedom."

Obama's inauguration followed many customs set by Lincoln and other presidents over more than two centuries.

Inauguration is the official day when the president of the United States is sworn into office, its purpose being to provide a visual, peaceful transfer of power, emphasize the seriousness of the office and

President Abraham Lincoln takes the oath as the 16th U.S. president in front of the U.S. Capitol in 1861.



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Oath of Office

Each U.S. president recites the following oath, in accordance with Article II, Section I of the U.S. Constitution:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

honor the new chief executive and commander in chief. Many traditions associated with presidential inaugurations—using the Bible when taking the oath of office, delivering an inaugural address—were established by America's first president, George Washington. He also pronounced the words "So help me God" after taking the oath, which other presidents have chosen to follow.

Inauguration Day begins with a morning prayer service. President Franklin D. Roosevelt began the tradition of attending such a service in 1933. After a brief meeting at the White House, the outgoing president, president-elect, vice president-elect and their families proceed to the U.S. Capitol building for the swearing-in ceremony.

Since the first inauguration in 1789, the procession to the inaugural ceremonies has been an occasion for much celebration. In fact, the parade that now follows the swearing-in ceremony first began as the procession. Things changed in 1873, when President Ulysses S. Grant reviewed the troops from a stand in front of the White House after he was sworn in.

For a greater part of America's history, Inauguration Day was held on March 4, which was also the final day of the congressional session. In 1937, the day was moved to January 20, a change enacted by the 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Upon arriving at the Capitol, the vice president takes the oath of office. Until 1937, most vice presidents did this in the Senate chamber, prior to the president's inauguration. After 1937, when the inauguration date changed, the vice president took his oath on the inaugural platform on the Capitol's east front. In 1981, at President Ronald Reagan's inauguration, both ceremonies moved to the west front terrace of the Capitol, where they have been held ever since.

Following the vice president, the president-elect takes the oath of office and addresses the nation.

Most presidents have used this speech to present their vision of America. In 1865, in the waning days of the Civil War, Lincoln stated, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle

and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

In another historic inaugural speech in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "...The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." President John F. Kennedy declared on his Inauguration Day in 1961, "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

While Washington's second inaugural address was the shortest by a U.S. president, at 135 words, William Henry Harrison delivered the longest—8,445 words—in 1841. John Adams' 1797 address, which totaled 2,308 words, contained the longest sentence, at 737 words.

In 1921, Warren G. Harding became the first president to take his oath and deliver

then proceed to the inaugural luncheon in the Capitol.

While the luncheon tradition dates to 1897, it acquired its current form in 1953 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower, first lady Mamie Eisenhower and 50 other guests dined on creamed chicken and potato puffs. As the years progressed, the luncheons became more elaborate. Often featuring cuisine reflecting the home states of the new president and vice president, as well as the theme of the inauguration, it includes speeches and toasts to the new administration.

In 1829, at President Andrew Jackson's first inaugural reception, a horde of 20,000 revelers broke windows, tore curtains and stood on the White House furniture in their muddy boots. While Jackson fled to the safety of a hotel, aides filled washtubs on the lawn with orange juice



An artist's rendition shows the crush of people after President Andrew Jackson's inaugural ceremony in 1829. More than 20,000 people turned up at the White House to meet the president.

his inaugural address through loud speakers. In 1925, Calvin Coolidge's address was the first to be broadcast across America by radio. And in 1949, Harry S. Truman became the first president whose inaugural speech was broadcast on television.

After the new president has taken the oath and delivered his inaugural address, he and the vice president escort the previous president and vice president out through a military cordon.

The new president and vice president

and whiskey, to lure the mob out.

After the luncheon, the president and vice president make their way down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, leading a procession of ceremonial military regiments, marching bands and floats. The parade is a celebrated and anticipated event for Americans, who watch it on television across the country.

The inauguration is free and open to the public, but members of the U.S. Congress and the administration of the incoming



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president give out tickets to the seated area to control the crowds. Hundreds of thousands more line up along Pennsylvania Avenue to watch the parade.

William Henry Harrison's parade in 1841 featured floats and military companies from outside the Washington, D.C. area for the first time. Citizens' clubs, political clubs, military bands and college students also marched in the parade, setting future precedent.

Despite a blizzard that forced President William H. Taft's inauguration ceremony indoors, the parade proceeded as planned, as workers busily cleared snow from the route in 1909. The only parade that was canceled because of bad weather was Ronald Reagan's second in 1985, when frigid temperatures made the situation dangerous. The largest parade, with 73 bands, 59 floats, horses, elephants and civilian and military vehicles, lasting four hours and 32 minutes, was in 1953 at Eisenhower's first inauguration. Now the

limit is set at 15,000 participants.

Women first participated in an inaugural parade in 1917, at Woodrow Wilson's second inauguration. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding became the first president to ride in the procession in an automobile. The parade was first televised in 1949, at Truman's inauguration. Jimmy Carter broke precedent in 1977 by walking in the parade, from the Capitol to the White House, with his wife, Rosalynn.

The much anticipated inaugural ball concludes Inauguration Day festivities. Most presidents and first ladies have held an inaugural ball since James Madison hosted the first in 1809.

President Ulysses S. Grant's second inaugural ball in 1873 proved to be a fiasco. It was freezing cold, and the temporary structure built to host the event had no heating or insulation. Guests danced in their overcoats and hats, the food was cold and organizers ran out of coffee and hot chocolate. Even the caged, decorative

canaries froze. In 1913, President-elect Woodrow Wilson felt the ball was too expensive and unnecessary for the solemn occasion of the inaugural and cancelled it.

Others who did not celebrate their inaugurations were those who came to office after the death of a predecessor, like Lyndon B. Johnson, who took the oath of office aboard Air Force One hours after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. On that occasion, Judge Sarah T. Hughes became the first woman to swear in a president.

Truman revived the official ball in 1949. Four years later, Eisenhower attended two balls due to high demand. Kennedy attended five balls in 1961. By Bill Clinton's second inaugural in 1997, the

For more information:

The inaugural addresses of the U.S. presidents
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/inaug.asp
 Inauguration Day
<http://inaugural.senate.gov/>
 Inaugural precedents and notable events
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/pihtml/pinotable.html>

Above, far left: Military units splash along in the pouring rain during the inaugural parade for President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937.

Above: Men aboard the state float of Massachusetts salute President John F. Kennedy during his inaugural parade in 1961.

Right top: Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as president on board Air Force One hours after President Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Witnesses include his wife, Lady Bird (left), and Jacqueline Kennedy (right).

Right center: President Jimmy Carter and first lady Rosalynn Carter walk down Pennsylvania Avenue after the president took the oath of office in 1977.

Right bottom: President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan dance at an inaugural ball in 1981.

number of balls reached a record 14.

Although inaugural traditions have evolved over the years, their fundamental premise remains unchanged. Inauguration Day represents the continuity of leadership for America. With its speeches and festivities, it also represents the country's renewal.



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